

(U) "Ask Zelda!": Message in a Bottle

FROM: "Zelda," Dispenser of Advice for SIGINTers on Workplace Issues

Run Date: 08/03/2011

(U) The text of this article is unclassified in its entirety.



Dear Zelda,

My work location is away from the main part of my team and manager. I work well independently and I appreciate the confidence my manager gives me by not micro managing.

It can be difficult, however, to be kept in the loop on day to day operations. Also not getting face time with the rest of my team on a regular basis can be difficult for interpersonal relations.

Do you have any suggestions for people that are off on our little island on how this can be addressed by the team and or manager?

Sincerely,
Castaway

Dear Castaway,

They say no man is an island, but it sounds like you are -- at least while you're at work. With office space at a premium these days, not only individuals but whole teams may find themselves physically cut off from the rest of the organization. In such cases, you should be extra diligent about communicating -- more than you think is necessary.

What the manager can do:

- Visit your people. Travel to their locations occasionally to meet with them. Is there an extra desk at the "outpost" location? Perhaps you could work one day a week (or even half a day) from this beachhead workstation. Not only will it show them you're making an effort to keep them in the loop, it will allow you "eyes on" to observe how they are performing their jobs.
- Hold a meeting once a week (or once a month) in which the whole team attends. Save important discussions about strategic direction for this meeting, if possible, and perhaps vary the location if you have employees in more than one building.

What the team can do:

- Let technology help you. If you don't already, use an organizational alias to send out information, rather than spreading the word verbally. That will ensure that people in other locations and on leave will receive the updates. Use a shared directory for your files, if practical, so all team members have access to joint projects.

- Publish a Weekly Activity Report, where each team member submits the highlights of what they worked on that week; then circulate it among the team members. This works well to stimulate discussion -- even between people who sit next to each other but may not know what their neighbor is doing.
- Socialize! Out of sight can be out of mind, so plan an office happy hour once in a while. It will be more difficult to forget about the castaway team member if you strengthen those interpersonal relationships.

What you can do:

- Ultimately, you, as the castaway, may have to make the bulk of the effort to stay in touch. Attend office functions (holiday parties, farewell luncheons) and use these opportunities to network with your co-workers -- in an unclassified way, of course. Although being on a private island may seem like paradise at first, the isolation and steady diet of coconuts can get old!
- Even if your organization doesn't adopt the Weekly Activity Report suggestion, you can send a summary of your own activities to the team -- or at a minimum, to your boss. If they see something interesting, they may contact you for more information. Be aware that, while it's great that your boss doesn't micromanage you, you want to make sure he knows all the good work you are doing so he can keep you in mind for recognition (awards and such).
- Visit your teammates. Attend meetings in person occasionally, even if it's not required.
- Pick up the phone. While email is a great way to communicate with a group of people all at once, if you have something to tell one person, why not call them? A live voice is an effective way to remind someone there's a human on the other end of the communication.

I'm sure there are plenty other people in your situation who've figured out creative ways to keep the lines of communication open, and I encourage them to add their thoughts and suggestions using Tapioca (link below). Don't let this poor castaway become best friends with a volleyball!

-*Zelda*

P.S. Thanks to all who sent in questions in response to the special call. I look forward to addressing them in the months to come.